

Baker: 'Doesn't believe for instant' conclusions of King death probe

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Tennessee Sen. Howard Baker, who had been in office a little more than a year when Dr. Martin Luther King was assassinated in his home state 10 years ago is still far from satisfied about who did it.

Despite official belief — by the FBI, the Memphis police and the state attorney general's office — that James Earl Ray was a lone wolf, unaided by anyone, Baker said "I don't believe it (the single assassin theory) for one instant."

A high-powered rifle bullet ripped out King's throat and jaw at 6 p.m. Memphis time, April 4, 1968, as he stood on a motel balcony. Ray subsequently pleaded guilty to the slaying and was sentenced to 99 years, but he has consistently claimed he was set up by a man he only knew as Raoul.

Contacted at his home in Huntsville, Baker said his belief is based in part on his friendship with Ed Redditt, a former Memphis police officer who was assigned to guard King while the civil rights

leader was, in Memphis during the 1968 sanitation workers' strike. Redditt and his partner, both black detectives, were ordered off the guard detail without explanation the day before the assassination.

Redditt was summoned to Washington last week to testify before the House Assassinations Committee, which is investigating the deaths of King and President Kennedy. The committee sessions are secret, and committee staff members would not comment on Redditt's three-hour-long testimony.

Meanwhile, Tennessee's adjutant general related how a racial epithet immediately after King's death caused the mobilization of 16,000 federal troops, who were dispatched to Memphis but turned around before they got there.

Maj. Gen. Carl Wallace, who was a major in the Tennessee National Guard assigned as its public information officer at the time, said he and other National

Guard officers were present at a meeting of civic leaders in the Guard Armory in Memphis on Saturday, April 6, two days after King's death.

A memorial march, to be led by Mrs. Coretta King, U.S. Sen. Robert Kennedy (D-N.Y.), singer Harry Belafonte and other celebrities, was scheduled in downtown Memphis for Monday morning, April 8, before King's funeral in Atlanta that afternoon. The meeting at the armory was called in part to discuss security arrangements for the Monday morning march.

Among the participants were the Rev. James M. Lawson, a leader of the Memphis black community who had been in the forefront of the sanitation strike, and Claude Armour, former Memphis police commissioner who was acting as Gov. Buford Ellington's advisor on civil disturbances.

Lawson and Armour had clashed before.
See Baker, Page 2

THE KNOXVILLE JOURNAL

Saturday, April 1, 1978

Baker From Page 1

fore. The blunt-spoken Armour was a symbol of racial oppression to many in the black community, while Lawson was viewed as a trouble-maker by Armour and others in the white establishment.

As Wallace relates the story, Armour warned Lawson that "If you don't con-

trol your people, the street's gonna be full of dead niggers."

Then, Wallace said, Lawson jumped up, shouting at Armour and saying, "Don't call us niggers!" and Armour shouted back, "We'll stop calling you niggers when you stop calling us m—f—s," using a popular street obscenity.

Two observers from the Justice Department left the room, and Wallace later learned they called Washington immediately, relating the incident to Secretary of the Army Harold Johnson. Johnson ordered federal troops to be in Memphis, to replace the 6,000 National Guardsmen already in the city or en route.

"The first thing we knew about it," Wallace said, "was at one o'clock Monday morning when this major general from Fort Campbell showed up with his entire staff, to take over." Brig. Gen. Hugh Mott, the Guard's troop commander, immediately notified Ellington of the federal intervention, and Ellington got President Lyndon Johnson out of bed to assure him that no federal troops were needed and that their presence might further enflame the community.

"Ellington told him, 'We don't need you we'll take care of our own,'" Wallace recalled. "That was about 4:30 or Monday morning, and 100 (troop carrier) airplanes were turned around in the air by that call from Ellington to President Johnson."

Some 8,000 National Guard troops

were sent to Memphis during the 40 days of the sanitation strike riots, the assassination and its aftermath. The fully-armed troops were divided into "Tac Teams" consisting of a truck carrying 8 to 10 men, led by a police vehicle. Inside the lead car were a city policeman, a state trooper and a Guard officer or top-ranking non-commissioned officer.

Wallace said the teams were deployed so that "Anywhere in the city, we could have a tac squad in two minutes."